INTERLOCK MECHANISM FOR LATERAL FILE CABINETS

Background of the Invention

The present invention relates to filing cabinets, and more particularly to mechanisms adapted to prevent one or more of the drawers in the filing cabinet from being opened.

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It has been known in the past to include interlock mechanisms on filing cabinets that prevent more than one drawer in the cabinet from being opened at a single time. These interlock mechanisms are generally provided as safety features that are intended to prevent the filing cabinet from accidentally falling over, a condition that may be more likely to occur when more than one drawer in the cabinet is open. By being able to open only a single drawer at a given time, the ability to change the weight distribution of the cabinet and its contents is reduced, thereby diminishing the likelihood that the cabinet will fall over.

In addition to such interlocks, past filing cabinets have also included locks that prevent any drawers from being opened when the lock is moved to a locking position. These locks are provided to address security issues, rather than safety issues. These locks override the interlocking system so that if the lock is activated, no drawers may be opened at all. If the lock is not activated, the interlock system functions to prevent more than one drawer from being opened at the same time. Oftentimes the system that locks all of the drawers and the interlock system that locks all but one of the drawers are at least partially combined. The combination of the locking system with the interlocking system can provide cost reductions by utilizing common parts.

Past locking and interlocking mechanisms, however, have suffered from a number of disadvantages. One disadvantage is the difficulty of changing the drawer configurations within a cabinet. Many filing cabinets are designed to allow different numbers of drawers to be housed within the cabinet. For example, in the cabinet depicted in FIG. 1, there are three drawers in the cabinet. For some cabinets, it would be possible to replace these three drawers with another number of drawers having the same total height as the three original drawers. This reconfiguration of the drawers is accomplished by removing the drawer slides on each side of the drawer and either repositioning the drawer slides at the newly desired heights, or installing new drawer slides at the new heights. Many drawer slides include bayonet features that allow the drawer slides to be easily removed and repositioned within the cabinet.

In the past, such reconfiguring of the drawers in a cabinet has been a difficult task because the interlocking and/or locking system for the drawers could not easily be adjusted to match the newly configured filing cabinet. For example, U.S. Patent No. 6,238,024 issued to Sawatzky discloses an interlock system that utilizes a series of rigid rods that are vertically